



Ethical Reading Webinar #1

Ethics – what is it and why does it matter?

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Ethical Reading

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- ❖ Our mission is to help embed ethics into the way we live and work in Reading.
- ❖ **We want to Inspire, Educate & Collaborate**
- ❖ We have 30 Partners and Supporter organisations and over 1,500 individual members/followers
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Ethics — Definition

- ❖ 'Ethics' refers
 - ❖ either to a distinctive set of considerations that can favour or disfavour actions, policies, dispositions of character, and scenarios,
 - ❖ or to the study of those distinctive considerations — their content, form, structure, authority, relation to other features of the world, etc.
- ❖ **Ethical Reading** focuses on increasing people's and organisation's conformity with ethical considerations.
- ❖ Club rules, etiquette, law, and self-interest also generate considerations about how we should behave.
- ❖ So what distinguishes ethical considerations from other considerations about how we should behave?



Ethical considerations defined by their ...?

- ❖ One view is that ethical considerations are defined by their **role in promoting aggregate well-being and protecting human dignity** (perhaps in large part by opposing human inclinations that threaten to result in conflict and chaos).
- ❖ Admittedly, club rules, etiquette, law, and self-interest often call for the same actions that ethical considerations favour.
- ❖ But club rules, etiquette, law, and self-interest don't have the same *defining role* that ethical considerations have.
- ❖ Another view is that ethical considerations are defined by their **necessary connection to appropriate feelings of resentment, indignation, or guilt**. Necessarily, such feelings are appropriately directed at someone if & only if that person has ignored or mishandled ethical considerations.



The main ethical considerations are ...

- ❖ **A general moral obligation to do good** for others, and especially to prevent disaster.
- ❖ **Moral prohibitions** on killing or physically harming innocent others against their wishes, stealing or vandalizing others' property, breaking promises, telling lies, and threatening to do any of these things.
 - ❖ Generally, your duty is to make sure *you* don't kill, steal, break promises, etc.; it isn't to minimize the number of such acts done by others. In many hierarchical settings, however, people higher in the hierarchy are more or less responsible for the behavior of people lower in the hierarchy.
- ❖ And...



The main ethical considerations are ...

- ❖ **Special moral obligations:** When deciding how to allocate of your own time, energy, and other resources, you should give some degree of (but not infinite) priority to the welfare of your family and friends. There are also special obligations of gratitude to your benefactors and obligations of apology and compensation to those whom you wrongly harmed. Obviously, a lawyer or negotiator or consultant (etc) has duties to her clients that she doesn't have to other people.
 - ❖ In many contexts, however, special connections must not be taken into consideration. These are contexts where one's job or role requires strict impartiality, and in such contexts others have rights that special connections not have any influence on decisions.
- ❖ **The prerogative** to give one's own good either somewhat *greater* weight, or somewhat *less* weight, than the equal good of others when one is deciding how to spend one's own resources.



Summary of ethical considerations

- ❖ We might summarize the previous slide by saying that ethical considerations take the shape of injunctions to
 - ❖ Be kind
 - ❖ Respect others' moral rights including
 - ❖ Their right not to be physically attacked,
 - ❖ Their right not to be lied to or stolen from,
 - ❖ Their right to have promises to them kept,
 - ❖ Their right to loyalty in various contexts,
 - ❖ and their right to impartiality in other contexts
- ❖ What has been left out?
- ❖ Duties to the self? Duties to the environment?



Why do ethical considerations matter?

- ❖ Life would be “nasty, brutish, and short” if we had to spend all our resources on preventing others from attacking us, stealing from us, breaking their promises to us, lying to us, etc.
- ❖ The law had better try to protect us from attack, theft, and dishonesty. But the law has its limitations, both in formulation and enforcement. Thus, law needs buttressing and supplementation by ethical prohibitions on generally harmful behavior.
- ❖ Apart from the danger of attack by others, everyone has a brighter future if each is generally motivated to help others and especially motivated by special connections with others.
- ❖ Ethics matters because the world will be a better place if people care strongly about others’ welfare and rights than if people don’t care strongly about these things — a better place for us and for everyone else.



Ethics & Organisations

- ❖ Ethical considerations apply not only to individuals in their private lives but also to the work place.
- ❖ Often decisions made at work will have a much wider impact on others than decisions made outside work.
- ❖ Different ethical considerations come into play at different levels of hierarchy in an organization.
- ❖ Facts about people that might be relevant in our private lives might not in our work lives & vice versa.
- ❖ Life without privacy would be intolerable.
Organisations need reminding of privacy's value.



Case study

- ❖ Your boss is unkind to anyone he thinks isn't fully in agreement with him. He regularly grabs for himself far more credit than is justified. For moral reasons, you don't like this man and don't like being associated with him, though you might keep quiet about that out of fear of his wrath.
- ❖ Suppose you invade his privacy unintentionally, e.g., by opening a letter you thought was addressed to you but was addressed to him. The letter reveals he is having an affair. If you leaked that he is doing this, he would be discredited in the eyes of his bosses.
- ❖ Is it ethical to leak it?
- ❖ The fact that the man is unlikable does not entail that any kind of treatment of him is permissible.



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- ❖ **THANK YOU** for joining us today!

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